

Long Live the King Sermon Series  
#1 – I Just Can't Wait to Be King  
I Sam. 16:1-3  
July 23, 2006

Do you know Clifford the Big Red Dog? If you have kids at home, or have visited with your grandchildren, you probably know him. He's not the kind of dog you forget. Clifford started out as the runt of the litter. He was selected by his owner, Emily Elizabeth, because he was so small and cute. But he didn't stay small long. Emily Elizabeth loved Clifford so much that her love made him grow...and grow...and grow. He got so big that his city apartment building couldn't hold him, so he and his family had to move to Birdwell Island. Clifford became the most popular resident of the island, and he spends time hanging out with his friends and doing heroic deeds that only a 20-foot tall dog can do.

King David is the Clifford of the Old Testament. Of all the great danes and saint bernards we read about in the Hebrew scriptures, David stands head and shoulders above the rest. Consider this: In the Old Testament, we find 14 chapters about Abraham, 13 about Joseph, 11 about Jacob, and 40 about Moses. But there are 66 chapters dedicated to the life of David. His influence and stature grew so big that the Old Testament couldn't hold him; there are 57 references to David in the New Testament. And he is credited with writing many of the beautiful psalms we have. David is truly one of the big dogs of the Bible.

But he didn't start out that way. During this sermon series, we'll be taking a look at the life of David, from his unassuming beginnings, through his rise to the throne, to his up-and-down rule as king. David has been called "the greatest saint and sinner in the Bible." Since I believe we all have a little bit of both in us, David might have something to teach us about having faith.

To understand David's story, we have to understand a bit about the history of Israel leading up to his appearance in 1 Samuel. The nation of Israel was governed for a long time by a series of judges. These judges served as God's representatives and provided leadership for God's people. But the only true ruler of the Israelites was God. He was the highest authority.

As we saw when the Israelites were in the wilderness with Moses, God wasn't always good enough for them. They looked around at other nations and saw they had earthly kings, so the Israelites decided they also wanted a king they could see and touch and complain about and blame things on and so on.

God didn't like this too much, but he let them have their way. So the Israelites named Saul the first king of Israel. Now, Saul was what you would expect a king to be: handsome, strong, well-spoken. His hair was well-coifed and his suits were Armani. He commanded attention and respect. He was an obvious choice and the people were thrilled to have him.

The only problem was that Saul wasn't a good king. He stopped seeking God's direction and tried to take matters into his own hands. He proved the old axiom that just because someone looks like a good leader and talks like a good leader, that doesn't mean they are a good leader. In fact, the last verse of I Samuel 15 says, "The Lord was sorry that he had made Saul king."

So that brings us to our text today. God sends the prophet Samuel to see a man named Jesse, because from his sons will come the new king. Now, Samuel is a little concerned about this mission on which God has sent him. Samuel has no hesitation anointing a new king – he hasn't been thrilled with Saul – but the problem is that the old king isn't quite gone yet. Despite his stumblings, Saul is still king, and probably wouldn't be too thrilled with Samuel to find out Samuel is going around anointing Saul's successors. But Samuel's loyalty is to God, not Saul, so he goes.

Samuel meets with Jesse and sees his oldest son, Eliab. Eliab was a wonderful physical specimen: tall, handsome, confident. Samuel says to himself, "There he is! He just looks like a king." But God says, "No." Then Samuel sees son #2, Abinadab. While not quite as impressive as son #1, Abinadab certainly met all the kingly requirements. But God says, "No." Then Samuel meets the third son, Shammah. OK, maybe not the top of the line model, his suits may be from Sears instead of Armani, but not a clunker either. "He'll do," says Samuel. "No he won't," says God. Son #4. No. Son #5. No. Son #6. No. Son #7. No.

That's it. That's all the sons that Samuel sees. Any of them would have been just fine as kings; they all looked the part. But as God reminded Samuel, God doesn't look at our characteristics, but our character. God doesn't consider the color of our eyes; God considers the capacity of our hearts. And none of these seven sons fit the bill.

There's some interesting symbolism here. All you biblical numerologists out there – you know who you are – realize the significance of the number seven. It means completeness, perfection. Think of the seven days of creation. The seven sons represented all that is good and right and worthy in a worldly sense. They are the perfect pool from which to select a king.

On the contrary the number eight doesn't have that kind of meaning. We're not told what God did on the eighth day of creation, because it doesn't matter. In a sense, the number eight is meaningless. It's extra baggage. It's the leftovers.

Which also describes Jesse's eighth son. After seeing the first seven, Samuel says, "Is that all there is?" And Jesse says, "Yeah... Oh, wait! There's one more, little What's-His-Name, out with the sheep. Do you really want to see him?" And Samuel, to his credit, says, "Look, God told me to see all your sons, and I'm not leaving here until I do."

So in comes the runt of the litter. We're not even told his name. We're told that he was good-looking, but probably in an eighth-son sort of way. And God says, "There he is! Rise and anoint him; he is the one."

I'm not sure we can understand just how absurd this decision must seem. Samuel's just seen seven fine, hardy, upstanding young men, and he's been told to anoint the short one who smells like sheep. It's as if the Chicago Bulls needed someone to shoot a game-winning free throw, and instead of picking Michael Jordan or Scottie Pippen, they select the ballboy.

So God's chosen king is David. He's not a human accident; he's a divine intervention. Should we really be surprised? Haven't we learned by now that God's criteria is much, much different than ours? We've seen time and time again how God chooses the younger, the weaker, the less popular to do God's work. Isaiah prophesied about one of God's chosen ones. In his description of the messiah in chapter 53, he wrote this: "He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar

with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.” And yet God chose him to die on the cross for our sins.

God often chooses those whom we overlook. So much of a person’s value is determined by worldly criteria: their looks, their wealth, their possessions. We naturally place our trust and authority in people who look like they deserve it and who look like they are worthy of being entrusted with it. But road of history is littered with fallen leaders like Saul, who forgot that the real King, the real President, the real CEO is God.

God doesn’t want people who make good impressions. He wants people who make good servants. Is this person authentic? Do they have a heart for God? We often overlook people because they don’t appear to be gifted or valuable. But that’s because we’re seeing them through the world’s eyes, and not God’s. Who would have thought a mere shepherd boy could become the greatest king in Israel’s history? No one but God.

If you’re the shepherd boy, if you’re the eighth son, if you are the one who’s been on the outside looking in, God is saying that you are valuable. People may have told you otherwise, but they aren’t seeing what God is seeing. God sees our hearts, and God chooses us and anoints us to do his work in this world. No one is too small or too insignificant for that job.

That’s true for everyone, not just those of us sitting here today. There are people right now out working in the fields and in the streets and in the factories who probably smell like sheep or worse and who probably don’t fit our preconceptions of God’s chosen ones. As Christians, it’s our responsibility to make sure that these folks have a place at the table. The world looks at them and only sees what it wants to see; we are called to see what God sees. We are all valuable, we all matter, and we are all called to serve. If we want to get a sense of who God is calling to do great things, we might want to look around and see who doesn’t have a voice, to see who is being pushed to the side. Because it’s the very people most consider human accidents that are actually divine interventions. Just ask the eighth son David.

I believe God is still calling leaders today. God still needs kings and queens to do the work of his kingdom. I believe God is calling you, and me, and people just like us, and people very different from us. We are called to have courage, to see people as God’s sees them, even if the world tells us something different. After all, who is our true president? Who is our true CEO? Who is our true king?